

NOTICE

Backhoe Policy

Effective for onsite sewage disposal applications submitted in the Thomas Jefferson Health District on or after November 1, 2005, backhoe pits are required for Health Dept staff to perform the soils evaluation required to issue a certification letter or construction permit for an on-site sewage disposal system. The cost of hiring the backhoe operator and making arrangements for the site visit are the responsibility of the applicant.*

This policy may apply for lots without an active permit even if previously approved by the Health Department as part of a subdivision and for any Level 2 reviews of work submitted by a private soil consultant, CPSS, AOSE or professional engineer (PE) when deemed appropriate by this office.

This policy has been adopted for several reasons:

1. The rapid pace of real estate development in the District has made it increasingly difficult for the Health Department to meet the demand for septic and well permits. Backhoe pits prevent wasted trips to the lot when a soils auger is inadequate to evaluate the soil conditions and provide for a more timely response to the large number of applications.
2. The quality of the information obtained by evaluating the soils from a backhoe pit vs. an auger boring is vastly superior. Auguring smears the soil material and distorts the structure, two of the most important characteristics being evaluated. In many cases rock and mottles can be so comminuted as to be unidentifiable in soil borings. Additionally, the depth of the soil horizons can be accurately established in a pit as opposed to making a crude estimation of these features from a soil boring.
3. Many of the soils now being evaluated are marginal or would have been considered unacceptable for any system until recent changes in state regulations. It is incumbent on the Health Department to have the best possible information in order to make as accurate a determination as possible and provide the most information for the applicant. For example, accurate depth of soil horizons is particularly important to determine if one of the newer alternative systems could be proposed for a lot where a conventional system must be denied.
4. The State Health Dept recently instructed all districts to ensure that all underground public utilities (through Miss Utility) and private utilities (through a private utilities marking contractor) are located prior to excavation of any kind including auger borings. By state regulation, the contractor who will perform the excavation work must make these arrangements. Health Dept staff do not qualify as contractors and neither does the owner of the property but a backhoe operator does.

* When the property owner's income makes the applicant eligible for a reduced application fee, special consideration may be given under this policy.